

Dance Department History Project 2010-2011

Transcribed interview of Linda Vernon Floyd on December 3, 2010 Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis

Hi this is Linda Vernon Floyd. I was known as Linda Vernon as well as Linda Hatch when I was at BYU. I transferred to BYU in 1960 from Cal State El Camino Junior College and became a dance major. I had two years, coming in as a junior to finish up all my class work, which was a real challenge. I remember one semester I had 18 credits and about 20 classes, because many of them were .5 credits, and I had to get them all in and do my whole major within that time so I could graduate on time.

When I came in, Dr. Leona Holbrook was in charge of the whole PE department and the encouraging or developing the dance program. There wasn't much of a department or really much of a major other than Phys Ed: Dance Emphasis major, and you could through the college of secondary ed get a degree and then teach in high school. But if you had a straight dance major like I did, after I graduated, there was nothing you could do.

So I went to BYU from 1960 to 1962 and graduated, and at that point, I had no idea what I could do. Dr. Holbrook suggested I get a graduate fellowship to work on a master's degree in Phys Ed: Dance Emphasis. That sparked interest in me, and it was the best offer I had and I would be encouraged to teach part time and have a fellowship. Actually, it turned out she hired two of us: Renae Young and myself as three-quarter-time faculty for that year. We were doing grad work and teaching a three-quarter load in 1962. Helen Beeman was also given a graduate fellowship.

There were three of us that started doing graduate work and dance at BYU, which was very interesting, because there were absolutely no graduate dance classes. We took the history and philosophy of PE and tried to gear it toward dance. For the rest of the classes, we were able to take from whatever classes we wanted for projects and theses and gear it towards dance. What I did was a project on Israeli folk dance. With that, I made a composition or program of five or six dances choreographed in a modern dance idiom using the Israeli folk dance form. That was quite an experience. Dr. Holbrook was a real taskmaster and she made sure that every single word, every single everything, was perfect. It was wonderful training for me to learn how to write. I've appreciated it, although at the time I didn't.

I went to summer school and in the fall and in the spring I did my project and then I was ready to graduate that summer. I turned in my projects written up, which was like a thesis. It was really a film project program done that I had analyzed the audiences' reaction to a program and wrote that all up and then she went over my thesis and told me I could do better. I took another year so I could. I wasn't the very first one to graduate. I think it was Helen who was the first "official dance major," next was me and then Renae, who's project was on Isadora Duncan and her contribution to dance. I think Helen's was on dance/drama during the time of Elizabeth the II or I don't know who. It was quite a new thing for us. I think we were pioneers and led the basis of future dance programs that would come on.

My husband at the time, Frank Hatch, was also getting his master's in drama and he did a dance drama based on the Book of Mormon called Lehi's vision. So there was some cross over there between the fine arts and the dance department. I want to really emphasize the importance of the contribution Leona Holbrook made when I came here in 1960. All of the dance classes were done in the old women's gym down on University or in some of the cultural halls of the adjoining wards. There was page school, which doesn't exist anymore, where tap dances were taught. My 19th ward Oak Hills stake center was used for rehearsals and so forth.

They were just finishing the Smith Fieldhouse, so all of our performances took place in the old Joseph Smith Auditorium, which was not much of a stage, it was quite small, with no curtains and a wood floor that had slivers in it. It was interesting. It was fun getting down to the women's gym because very few of us had cars. I myself had just come from living in CA to UT in the winter with my bike. I would get on my bike with my clothes and leotard and skirt because we weren't allowed to wear pants in those days. Women had to wear dresses everywhere. I would bike down University Hill to campus, and then I would have to bike back up because my dorm was in Heritage Halls. It was a real experience.

All of my classes were every hour so I would start out the day with a class in the women's gym, and then in page school, and then I might have one at the BRMB or one of the wards around in different areas. I got as much exercise getting to class as I did during classes. There were a lot of classes taught by advanced students. The teachers that I remember are Diane Chatwin and Karen Cornstrum, who had just graduated and was teaching dance. I'm sure she wasn't working at a master's because there wasn't such a thing at that point. And of course, Mary Bee Jensen.

In those days, you could dance with whatever group you wanted to, and I immediately signed up for the Program Bureau because I was a ballet dancer when I came. I had no idea what modern dance was about. Nothing. I had never even seen a modern dance, but I wanted to major in dance. I hadn't really done much with social dance, so

that was a new experience. We did social dance with Alma Heaton, who was a wonderful teacher and led me to minor in recreation because of his enthusiasm and spirit.

Ben de Hoyas was another one. At that point, the ballroom dance team didn't have any costumes. There were probably about twelve couples and we wore our Sunday best. We performed at all kinds of things: assemblies, half times, and so on and so forth. It was so fun to do social dance as well as ballet in the Program Bureau. I tried out for Orchesis, which was the modern dance group. I loved that. It was very different kind of movement than I had ever done before, since my background was ballet. But there was such a camaraderie with all the people in the group. We were down in the women's gym and put on all kinds of programs and assemblies.

Eventually the Fieldhouse was finished and we were able to perform there and have our assemblies there, which was a larger place to meet than the JSB auditorium. I also tried out for folk dancing; it was a really small group in those days. If you showed up, you were taken—there was probably more competition among the women, but if you were a man and showed up, and could move, you were part of the group.

It was so fun with Mary Bee. She loves her work and the dancing. I remember she would always bring specialists from different countries. I loved Scottish dance and doing the fling because it was so much like ballet. We learned all kinds of dances. We also made our own costumes, which was fun. We would usually take them home over Thanksgiving and do whatever handiwork we had to do. I remember for our Ukrainian costumes had all this cross-stitching we had to do—and the Polish costumes. We would also do Christmas Around the World.

I got to go on the first tour with the folk dancers and the Program Bureau. Janie Thompson was just a ball of energy and enthusiasm. That red head lady is still around, still vibrating. What an entertainer. I remember our first tour was to the World Fair in Seattle and I was going to be able to substitute for the Philippines dance. I had never learned the dance. I learned it in the hallway on the bus. The first time I actually did it was on stage. We were performing for wards and different stakes and members of the church throughout the area.

I loved touring with folk dancers. It was just a blast. Eventually, after two years in folk dancers, when I started doing grad work, I got to teach folk dance and I really enjoyed that. We did some choreography of these folk dancer suites, which was my emphasis since I was working on that in my master's degree. I really enjoyed that.

In summer of '64, the folk dancers had the opportunity to go on a tour of Europe and I loved that. We had the opportunity to go for six weeks. We had to pay our own way, in fact, as I learned later, Mary Bee and her husband Don, mortgaged their house so they could pay for the tour. I think it was \$400 for a six-week tour of Europe. We went and were in some festivals in Belgium, we toured Denmark, Germany, we went to a lot of countries. I have a whole book on that on the website with the day-by-day. I know we ended up in Rome to tour for two days. It was so fun. We held a testimony meeting in a nunnery, or a hotel run by nuns. I quoted in my journal that it was probably the first time a sacrament meeting was held in Rome, Italy, and that was in 1966. Now we have a temple going up there. I think that's the thing that came out of these tours—the opportunity to act as missionaries and reach out to the audience that came to see us and see the light for the church was about with our enthusiasm and our smiles.

I remember Mary Bee always saying, "Get your folk dance smiles on!"

You got so tired of smiling after awhile. It was fun.

What was interesting about the tour was that we had never done American folk dance before. We were an international folk dance group. We knew how to do Croatian and Scottish dances, but we had never done square dance. So of course, we had to immediately learn square dancing. We learned how to do clogging, round dances and square dances, and we had live orchestra, which was really fun. We had a fiddler, and Indian dancers with our show, which was a big hit. Europeans could not get over a real live American Indian doing their original dances.

We would go and watch other groups, like the Russian dances, and the American dances we had just barely learned. They loved it. They just ate it up and the audiences in Europe did too. It always worked out that we could do missionary work and we would have the missionaries come, and we were in the paper, and we usually attended a branch or community near where we were performing.

I think one of the questions I was given was, "What was my dream?" I think my dreams in coming to BYU was choosing to become a pro dancer. I had the opportunity to dance in a ballet company in Los Angeles, and I really enjoyed that, but their standards didn't go along with the church and I was very uncomfortable with the people who were in that group. I decided after much prayer to come to BYU and major in dance.

After I graduated, it was like, *I'm not married, now what do I do?* Leona Holbrook headed me in the direction of a master's degree, which was an answer to my prayer and something I hadn't expected. In getting my master's, it opened the opportunity for me to be a teacher at BYU, and then I got married and I had my first baby and we left BYU. I always felt sad about that because I've come back and seen how the program has grown and it is just delightful.

But I really feel now as I look back, I was really able to contribute something to the dance program at BYU. I'm not the only one. Anyone who ever taught or took a class has left something in the program, which has been able

to bloom and grow into what it is today. As I look at the performers today, they are professional, and we weren't even a tenth that good. Some people would never point their toes, or smile, or remember their dance steps, or just looked awkward or ill at ease. The dancers today are professional and wonderful, in all areas.

Today as I understand it, you can't be in folk dance, Orchesis, ballet, and Program Bureau. When I came, the program was small and just starting to grow. We grew out of the women's gym. Leona Holbrook was working with Milton Hartvigsen, the dean of the College of Physical Education, in planning the RB. I remember looking at the plans of the RB and him asking what we would like here, and where this should be. It was like a dream. Leona had planned her office so she could see Mount Timpanogos. Now there is a building between the office and the mountain. But, it was delightful to think we would have our own staging area. We had some curtains and an area that broke into a gallery for people to sit and watch.

Once we got into the building, we started this thing called Dancer's Showcase, where once a week, we would encourage students to perform their classroom showcases, or things they had worked on, so people could see what was happening. That was just fun.

Getting into the building was a great thing. Everything was consolidated here. We could have bars for ballet, and mirrors and places to store costumes and music. I wanted to mention that that was something Dr. Holbrook was very reticent about. She felt ballet and modern were fine arts, and an art form. But, Joan Clark Koralesky was the one who pushed her. She really wanted a ballet class. Finally, Dr. Holbrook conceded and let her teach one in the new building, and that program has bloomed. Joan was the one who started that. Others have started and restarted the ballroom dance team, before I was even there in the 50s. In fact, there was a person that I was made aware of, Aline Coleman Smith, who is now in her 99th year, who taught dance here in 1929, about the time that Leona Holbrook came. So Leona was here a good time, I would think the 1930s to the 1970s, about 40 years. Same as Susanne Davis. They were people who contributed to the history.

As I look back on dance in the very beginning, it's been delightful to see the Isadora Duncan type modern dance, the students in their little tunics doing interpretive dance back in the 1920s, and see it develop over the years because of the people brought in to teach. I wanted to mention a few of those too. I remember Ira Urchin. I didn't know her because she was before my time. Shirley Riley was one of those that came before I was here but went on to develop the dance program at the University of Utah. Jerry Glubber and Bob Oliphant, who later went up to Rick's to develop their program up there. Shirlene Oswald, Dave Koralesky, who was Joan's husband, who really gave so much expertise in the music area—he was an expert in music, and he would help us find music for performances. He helped set up the recording studio in the storage facility here. Burt Olsen, Bob Oliphant. Bob was a good example of a masculine dancer. D. Wayne Young was another in folk dance. Also Dwayne Goodwin that contributed to the folk dance as well. Gary Hopkinson, who is also deceased. Dave Campbell was in modern dance; he couldn't dance but helped with anything in music or setting up. Renae Yourg, I mentioned as one of the first master's in dance.

When we got into the RB, we still didn't have a place to perform. Very soon after, the HFAC was done, and that was a delight. Along with Diane, we were able to be the first directors of the concert that was performed in the Pardoe Theatre. We were so excited because we had to make a turntable for the dance. We were able to use a theatre that had seats on an incline and with curtains that opened and closed and fixed lights. That opened up all kinds of fun things. The dance department also got involved and choreographed the plays or Shakespearean plays that were done, and that was fun. That connection with the fine arts was great for our students to perform.

All the time, as the program was developing, Dr. Holbrook was trying to add classes and build the program. I remember sitting with her and she asked me how I felt about adding a class, and how to describe it. She was so precise in how she wanted it described and what the objective was and so forth. She was open to new ideas and there was a real enthusiasm and growth engendered, especially by the new building, more students wanting to major, and there was now a minor in dance. It was blooming until we had a department of dance. The department of dance wouldn't have happened without all the people involved.